Revisiting Brown and Levinson's Theory of Politeness

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to revisit Brown and Levinson's framework of politeness in order to reduce the overall number of positive politeness strategies from 15 to 7 order Pos Pol strategies and the number of negative politeness from 10 to 5 high-order Neg Pol strategies. This reanalysis ultimately builds up a self-consistent and coherent picture of polite usage that is intuitively satisfactory and economical. We end up with a general frame of reference that presents an organized analysis and theory of politeness, the main point of which is that it purports to be a general explanation of the particular phenomenon of disparity of usage and universality of use of politeness.

Keywords: Face-threatening act, positive/negative face, positive/negative politeness strategies, wants.

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1. Introduction

This framework purports to describe and account for the remarkable phenomenon of politeness in speech. On the basis of the observation of similarities across cultures in the basic principles underlying polite usage, Brown and Levinson set out to systematize a description of this phenomenon in the speech of three different cultures, namely, United States, Tzeltal, and Tamil. They came to the conclusion that there are, in fact, common mechanisms that regulate polite usage across the established boundaries of cultures and languages in time and space. Starting from the basic distinction between positive and negative politeness, they devised fifteen positive politeness strategies and ten negative politeness strategies.

It is true that the task of hypothesizing a comprehensive theory that would systematically describe universal polite usage requires a detailed description to account for the linguistic minutæ and disparities in languages and cultures. However, the finalized Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework definitely suffers from a depreciating weakness. While it provides a very detailed description of polite usage, it does not observe one of the basic canons of science, namely, economy. There are twenty-five politeness strategies that could be developed and compressed into a smaller number of high-order, comprehensive strategies that are more likely to reflect the abstract underlying generalizations of polite usage mechanisms that speakers must have internalized as part of their language acquisition. In fact, a close study of Brown and Levinson's strategies reveals that some of these could happily be subsumed under cover terms, including not different strategies but complementary facets of the same strategy. More elaboration in this respect will be provided as we proceed. It is, therefore, appropriate to present this framework for ease of reference and for the sake of clarity.

2. Positive Politeness and Positive Face

The theoretical notion of positive face is the desire and need of every speaker that, in speech encounters, his wants be admirable and attended to by others. Positive politeness, then, which is approach-based, anoints the face of the addressee by indicating that the speaker approves of the hearer's wants. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness is redress aimed at the addressee's positive face, his lasting desire that his wants should be considered desirable. This is because "face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must,

therefore, be constantly attended to" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 66) in speech interactions. In general, it is believed that the more effort the speaker expends in face-maintaining linguistic behavior, the more he communicates his genuine desire that the hearer's face wants to be satisfied and approved of. The strategies of positive politeness, as described by Brown and Levinson, involve three broad mechanisms: claiming common ground, conveying that the speaker and hearer are cooperators, and fulfilling the hearer's wants for some underlying goals like requests, questions, etc.

2.1. Claiming Common Ground

The speaker can claim common ground with the hearer in at least three different ways. Under each way is distinguished one or more positive politeness strategies. In the case of claiming common ground, Brown and Levinson outline three different strategies that the speaker can use to attend to some of his interlocutor's positive face wants.

2.1.1. Conveying "X" is Desirable, Interesting

The speaker can convey that his interlocutor's wants are admirable, interesting, etc., through three different strategies; the first Pos Pol strategy is to notice or attend to H's face wants, as in:

"Goodness, you cut your hair! (…) By the way, I came to borrow some flour." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 103)
"You must be hungry. It's a long time since breakfast. How about some lunch?" (op. cit.)

When H makes a face-threatening act (FTA) against himself (e.g., an imbalance of body control or any misconduct), S should refer to it and show that he is rather not embarrassed by it. (By way of contrast, in negative politeness, S would ignore H's faux pas). This can be done by a joke, teasing H about his inclination for the faux pas, or by considering himself as part of the fact (cf. the fourth and seventh positive politeness strategies below). The next two examples feature other instances of the first strategy:

"God, you're farty tonight!" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 104)
"We ate too many beans tonight, didn't we?" (op. cit.)

Another way to convey that H's wants are desirable is through the second Pos Pol strategy, which is exaggerating (approval, sympathy, interest with H), as in:

"What a fantastic garden you have!" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 104)
"Yes, isn't it just ghastly the way it always seems to rain just when you've hung your laundry out!" (op. cit.)
How absolutely unbelievable!

The third Pos Pol strategy is more thematically related to the two strategies outlined above: intensifying interest to H, whereby S communicates to H that he shares parts of his wants and intensifies the interest of his own contributions to the interaction by relating a good story using the vivid present tense, as is exemplified by the ensuing extract:

"I come down the stairs, and what do you think I see? A huge mess all over the place, the phone's off the hook and clothes are scattered all over..." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 106)
"Black I like. I used to wear it more than I do now. I very rarely wear it now. I wore a black jumper, and when I wore it, my Mom said, "Ah," she said. But he likes it; he thinks it looks ever so nice, and quite a few people do. But when my Mom saw it, she said, "Oh," it's not your color; you're more for pinks and blues." (op. cit.)

In the extracts above, S intensifies interest in H by recounting a good story via an indirect speech act. But "the use of directly quoted speech rather than indirect speech is another feature of the third Pos Pol strategy, as is the case of tag questions or expressions that draw H as a participant into the conversation" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 107), like "you know," "see what I mean?" or "isn't it?."
A similar technique in this respect is overstating facts or making exaggerations:

"There were a million people in the Co-op tonight!" (Brown & Levinson, op. cit.)
"I've never seen such a row!" (Brown & Levinson, op. cit.)
"You always do the dishes! I'll do them this time." (Brown & Levinson, op. cit.)

In 2.2, we have pointed out the fact that some of Brown and Levinson's strategies could be viewed as constituting different varieties of a high-order strategy, thus reducing the total number of strategies and respecting the canon of economy in science. In this regard, we can consider the above three positive politeness strategies as different facets of one particular strategy. In fact, we notice a common feature in all three strategies: S shows interest in H's wants. The speaker's underlying message is to convey that H's wants, needs, and goods are interesting. The only difference between these three strategies is the degree or intensity of interest that S shows towards H, depending on different contexts. However, they all center on one basic intention: S shows interest in H's wants. For this reason, we can label this high-order strategy as the Interest strategy, which can be deemed as the main theme of the high-order strategy under which the other three strategies would be subsumed.

2.1.2.   *Claiming In-group Membership*

In this regard, S can assume co-membership with H in the same social group through only one Pos Pol strategy, the fourth, which is to "use in-group identity markers. By using any of the innumerable ways to convey in-group membership" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 107) to an exclusive clan, S can implicitly claim common grounds and allegiances with H that are "carried by that definition of the group. These include in-group usages of address forms, language or dialect, of jargon or slang, and of ellipsis" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 107) (cf. the T/V systems, after the French "tu" and "vous"). All these in-group usages and markers stipulate some background knowledge that enhances the bonds of in-group membership. It should be noticed that the use of slang is more common in this respect:

Here buddy, I kept this seat for one of my friends . . .
Help me with this suitcase here, will you chum?

In interactions where code-switching is more likely, S may switch into the code identifying with in-group and local values,and this way encodes positive politeness when an FTA requires redress.

In the Moroccan situation, such code-switching may be observed in speech encounters between Berberspeakers, who can, and often do, switch from Arabic to Berber in the presence of non-Berber speakers, with the hope of intensifying in-group membership and excluding non-Berber speakers. To claim in-group membership, a speaker can use slang or jargon:

Got any fags?
Lend us tenquids then, wouldjabuddy?

Or make use of contraction and ellipsis:

"Mind if I smoke?" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 112)
"Got any spare cash?" (Brown & Levinson, op. cit.)

Unlike the preceding strategies and others to come in this presentation of Brown and Levinson's framework, the fourth Pos Pol strategy stands out as very specific and different from the others. For the sake of clarity, we propose to call it the Co-identity strategy. While the other strategies focus on H's wants per se, the fourth strategy is carried out through linguistic markers. In fact, for S to claim in-group membership with H, he has to resort to slang words, jargon, ellipses, or special dialects to convey this message. All these elements are linguistic markers par excellence and presuppose shared knowledge between S and H, without which no claim about co-membership between S and H to a given socio-economic group can be asserted.

2.1.3.   *Claiming Similar (Opinions, Background, Empathy, Attitudes, etc.)*

The speaker can claim shared opinions, attitudes, and knowledge with H through at least four different strategies. We will see later that they are not that different from each other, as they center on, or rather aim to convey roughly the same underlying message. The fifth Pos Pol strategy in this series is, then, to seek agreement. In this regard, the raising of "safe topics" allows S to stress his agreement with H and, therefore, to satisfy H's desire to be "right" or to be corroborated in his opinions. The more S knows about H. The closer to home, the safer topics he can pursue with H. On the other hand, agreement may also be stressed by repeating part or all of what a preceding speaker has said in conversation:

Andrew drove to Norwich this weekend!
To Norwich.
"I had a flat tyre on the way home." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 113)

"Oh God, a flat tyre." (op. cit.)

By repeating part of H's turn at speaking, S tries to show he is holding the line of conversation, being a listening ear, that is, and asserting his agreement and approval of H's story.

Another way of claiming common opinions and attitudes with H is through the sixth Pos Pol strategy of avoiding disagreement. "The desire to agree or appear to agree with H also leads to mechanisms for pretending to agree" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 113),which is an instance of "token agreement":

That's where you live, Georgia?
That's where I grew up.
"What is she, small?" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 114)
"Yes, yes, she's small, smallish, um, not really small, but certainly not very big." (op. cit.)

Or pseudo-agreement, as in:

So, when are you coming to visit us?
Take this watchoff my hands for 10 quids, then?

Needless to say, the sixth strategy is the counterpart of the fifth one since avoiding disagreement basically presupposes, and finally leads to, seeking agreement, which comes down roughly to the same intention. In the same spirit as the fifth strategy, hedging opinions are also used. S will opt for vagueness in voicing his own opinions in order to disguise his disagreement with H. Normally, hedging is used to feature negative politeness, but some hedges may also have some positive politeness function, e.g., sort of, in a way, kind of, etc.:

It's really gorgeous, in a way.
I don't know. I think people have a right to their own opinions (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 116)

The use of these hedges presupposes some shared knowledge between S and H andis confident that H will appropriately interpret S's attitude, message, intention, etc.

In the same vein as the preceding two strategies of claiming common opinions, knowledge, etc., the seventh Pos Pol strategy is used by S to assume, presuppose, and assert common ground with H. One way to achieve this is through what Brown and Levinson call "Personal-center switch: S to H. This is where S speaks as if H were S or H's knowledge were equal to S's knowledge" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 119), using tag questions, giving empathy, interchanging point of view:

I really had a hard time learning to swim, you know.
Now, have we taken our medicine? (Doctor to patient) (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 119)

The speaker can also assume awareness of H's wants, attitudes, and opinions, e.g., by making negative interrogations thatrequire "yes" as an answer:

Wouldn't you like some cookies?
Don't you think it's gorgeous?

Or presupposing H's knowledge and principles are the same as S's and presupposing that referents are known to H:

Well, I was watching Star Warsthe other day, and . . .
Stanley took us to the theaterlast weekend.

We have so far seen that S can assume similar opinions, attitudes, or knowledge with H by seeking agreement, avoiding disagreement, or assuming common ground with H. The speaker can also claim common opinions with H through the eighth Pos Pol strategy in this series, which is that of joking. This strategy should not be considered in the sense of telling jokes but rather as a way of kidding. Since jokes are based on shared background, mutual knowledge, and attitudes, joking is a necessary tool for positive politeness to put H "at ease," for example, in response to H's misconduct or minimizing an FTA of requesting:

Oh, what if I take some of these cookies now?
How about lending me this old heap of junk? Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 124) (H's Mercedes).

It is the case that a close analysis of the four preceding strategies can help to give a good insight into their intrinsic common feature around which they center. In fact, we notice that by making use of these strategies, the speaker intends to convey a clear message, which can be summarized as follows: S and H are co-equals. In order to make H aware of this intention, S either seeks agreement, avoids disagreement, presupposes agreement, or makes joking remarks to redress an FTA. All these strategies can be subsumed under a high-order strategy, which can be suitably labeled the agreement strategy. This label is justified because the four strategies stipulate that S ultimately seeks the agreement of stances with H, so they look as utterly co-equals. It follows from this review that the Agreement strategy is a high-order strategy that is realized in four different versions available to S in order to show his agreement with H in different ways, all disclosing common opinions, attitudes, etc.

2.2.   *Conveying that S and H are Cooperators*

We have so far outlined the three main ways of claiming common ground, a mechanism under which the first eight strategies of positive politeness are subsumed. We have also tried to categorize them into three main high-order strategies after grasping their general themes and showing the common features of some strategies that make them fittingly subsumed under one of the three high-order strategies schematized so far. The second procedure of positive politeness, which conveys that S and H are cooperators, is carried out through the following six strategies. These can also be grouped into three main categories and, accordingly, three high Pos Pol strategies subsuming one or more strategies.

2.2.1.   *Presupposing or Assuming S's Concern for and Awareness of H's Wants*

In this regard, S indicates he is aware of H's wants and is taking them into consideration. S will stress his cooperation by showing that he knows and is sensitive to H's wants and desires. This intention seems parallel with the mechanism of conveying that both S and H are cooperators, which strengthens the point of relationship between S and H, as in:

> "Look, I know you want the car by 5 p.m., so shouldn't I go to town now? (request)" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 125)
> I know you don't fancy parties, but believe me, this one will betotally different; please come! (request/invitation)

It is worth noting that in the above examples, S lays an emphasis on the fact that S and H are cooperators, basically to redress an FTA of invitation, thus leading H to acquiesce with S's desires. Given that by making use of this strategy, S attempts to empathize with H, we suggest labeling it as the Empathy strategy to be paralleled with the preceding three high-order strategies previously outlined, namely, the Interest strategy, which subsumes the first three Pos Pol strategies, the Co-identity Strategy, which is the fourth Pos Pol strategy, and the Agreement strategy, under which are subsumed Pos Pol Strategies 5, 6, 7, and 8.

2.2.2.   *Claiming Reflexivity*

This is actually an alternative way of showing that S and H are cooperators that operate in different mechanisms, manifested in at least four strategies. One of these is the tenth positive politeness strategy: offer, promise. "In order to redress the potential threat of some FTA, S may choose to stress his cooperation with H" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 125) by making offers and promises to impart his sincere intentions in satisfying the wants of H's positive face:

> I'llpop in probably next week.

By making this promise, S, in fact, claims reflexivity on the part of H, intending that H would be pleased if S finds the time to pay back a visit. S can also claim reflexivity by having recourse to the eleventh strategy: being optimistic. Presumptuous or "optimistic" expressions of FTAs "constitute perhaps the most dramatic difference between positive politeness and negative politeness" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 126) strategies of redressing FTAS since Positive politeness is basically approach-based, and its observance stipulates some directness and boldness on the part of the speaker, as in:

> "I've come to borrow a cup of flour." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 126)
> "I'm borrowing your scissors for a sec, OK?" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 127)

Notice that in other situations where there is less chance for S to claim reflexivity, such presumption might be interpreted as rudeness and might lead to undesirable counter-effects. However, such over-optimistic expressions of FTAs seem to function by reducing the potential risk and size of the face

threat by implying that it is normal to request or that the intimacy and, hence,cooperation between S and H means that such petty things may be considered acceptable.

Besides being optimistic, S can also claim reflexivity by means of the twelfth Pos Pol strategy, which includes both S and H in the activity. S can achieve this by using the inclusive pronoun "we" form when S actually means "you" or "me"; he, thus, calls upon the cooperative assumptions in order to redness FTAs.

Consider the following examples:

Let's have a slice of this, then! (i.e., me)
Let's carry on with lunch, eh? (i.e., you)
"Let's stop for a bite. (i.e., I want a bite, so let's stop.)" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 127)

In effect, what S is doing is interchanging pronoun referents, relying on H's alertness to grasp the exact target referent that S intends, and, thus, including H in an activity which he might have been reluctant to comply with had it not for the shift in pronoun referents. This is, as we have already stated, only one of the ways for S to claim reflexivity. Another way lies in the thirteenth Pos Pol strategy, which is to give (or ask for) reasons. In this regard, "indirect suggestions, which demand rather than give reasons, are a conventionalized positive politeness form in English:" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 128).

Why not lend me your lawnmower for the weekend?
Why don't we go to the movies?

By making such a choice of claiming reflexivity, S implies that being both cooperators, he sees no reason whatsoever why H wouldn't satisfy his desire, thus effectively redressing the imminent threat in the FTA of requesting.

The Four preceding strategies were actually different ways that are available to the speaker to claim reflexivity, which is the second technique of conveying that S and H are cooperators. For this reason, the tenth, the eleventh, the twelfth, and the thirteenth Pos Pol strategies can be subsumed under a high-order strategy, which can be suitably labeled as the Reflexivity strategy. In fact, S can resort to any one of these four strategies, depending on contexts and intentions, to claim reflexivity with H.

The third technique of conveying that S and H are cooperators is the one by which S claims reciprocity on the part of H by way of the fourteenth Pos Pol strategy of asserting or assuming reciprocity. "By pointing to the reciprocal right (or habit) of doing FTAS to each other, S may soften" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 128) the weight of "his FTA by negating the debt aspect and/or the face-threatening aspect of speech acts such as criticisms and complaints" (op. cit.). Brown and Levinson do not provide natural extracts exemplifying this strategy but suggest that likely examples would have the following structures as a model:

I'll do this for you if you do that for me.
I did that for you last month, so you dothis for me this weekend.

This strategy stipulates that S claims some right or debt incurred, presumably previously, by H so that the threat inherent in S's FTA is weakened on the basis that, by and large, S and H are cooperators. This reciprocity aspect in this strategy differentiates it from the preceding four strategies, which zoom into the reflexivity notion. This fact lead us to suggest earlier that the four strategies numbered 10 to 13 be conceived of as constituting different versions of the high-order strategy couched the Reflexivity strategy. The speaker can, then, claim reflexivity of attitudes and opinions with H by making promises or offers, being optimistic, including H in S's intention, or by giving (or asking for) reasons. On the other hand, S can claim reciprocity, which is also another mechanism of conveying cooperation, through the fourteenth Pos Pol strategy of assuming or asserting reciprocity of incurring debts between S and H, the Reciprocity strategy.

2.3. Fulfilling H's Wants (from Some X)

This is the third procedure of positive politeness, namely that of satisfying H's wants and desires for some expected pleasing gestures in return. To achieve this, S has to recourse to only one strategy, fathe fifteenth Pos Pol strategy: giving gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation). S "may satisfy H's positive face wants (that S wants H's wants, to some degree) by actually satisfying some of H's wants" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 129) in concrete terms. Obviously, S achieves this Pos Pol strategy by actually giving gifts to H for some unavowed, expected good turns. Hence, we have the

classic politeness action of giving gifts, not only physical gifts but also social and sentimental ones, such as admiring, liking, caring, understanding, listening, and so on.

We have said that positive politeness involves three broad mechanisms: claiming common ground, conveying cooperation, and fulfilling H's wants (for some X). We have seen that these mechanisms encompass different strategies amounting to fifteen Pos Pol strategies. We have also suggested that these strategies can be reduced in number by capturing the common aspects in order to group them into high-order strategies. By way of summary, we point out that under the first mechanism of claiming common ground are subsumed three high-order strategies. We label the first as the Interest strategy, which encompasses strategies 1 to 3, which vary according to the degree of intensity of Interest S shows to H. We name the second high-order strategy the Co-identity strategy, which is featured in the fourth strategy of using in-group identity linguistic markers. Under the third high-order strategy, labeled the Agreement strategy, we have grouped four strategies as they all disclose S's intention to show agreement in opinions, attitudes, and knowledge with H.

The second broad mechanism of conveying cooperation encompasses six strategies distributed into three high-order strategies. In the first one, named the Empathy strategy, we have only one strategy, the ninth, by which S shows he is aware of H's wants and is taking them into consideration. The second high-order strategy, labeled the Reflexivity strategy, comprises four strategies numbered 10 to 13. As a matter of fact, these strategies are used by S to claim reflexivity on the part of H by making promises or offers, being optimistic, including H in S's intention, or giving (or asking for) reasons. Similarly, the speaker assumes reciprocity by using the fourteenth strategy of claiming reciprocity, which, as a high-order strategy, can be termed the Reciprocity strategy. Under the third broad mechanism of fulfilling H's wants (for some X), we have the last positive politeness strategy, which requires S to give gifts to H, like goods, sympathy, understanding, or cooperation.

This distinction between high-order and low-order strategies enables us to reduce the total number of Pos Pol strategies, as outlined by Brown & Levinson, from fifteen to seven basic high-order strategies from which emanate the fifteen low-order strategies. To avoid confusion, the latter can simply be labeled techniques or technical applications of the seven basic strategies, which constitute an economic account of positive politeness in speech.

3. NEGATIVE POLITENESS AND NEGATIVE FACE

The theoretical ideation of negative face can be described as the desire of every competent adult speaker that his actions are not impeded by others. Negative politeness, then, which is essentially avoidance-based, consists of assuming that the speaker acknowledges and respects the addressee's negative face desires and will not confront the hearer's freedom of action. "Negative politeness is redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 129). According to Brown and Levinson, in Western culture, negative politeness behavior is at the heart of basic politeness. Actually, just as positive politeness is the kernel of "familiar" and "joking" behavior, negative politeness is the epitome of respectful behavior. In their framework, Brown and Levinson outline negative politeness strategies into five major sub-groups or broad mechanisms, each subsuming one or more Neg Pol strategies. These mechanisms are being indirect, not presuming or assuming, not coercing H, communicating S's desire not to disturb H, and compensating for other wants of H. These are realized through 10 apparently different, negative politeness strategies.

3.1. Being Conventionally Indirect

It has been stated before that negative politeness is essentially an avoidance-based attitude. In fact, we will notice throughout that by having recourse to negative politeness strategies, the speaker attempts, by every means, to distance himself from the hearer and, accordingly, from the threat in FTAs likely to impinge on H, as exemplified by the following extracts:

– Can you please close the window?
– I need a brush.
– I'm looking for a hairbrush.

The following derivative wants can also be predicted from the first Neg Pol strategy: being pessimistic (i.e., assuming H is less likely to do any acts expected from him), making questions or hedges (i.e., not assuming H will do some requested acts). In other words, S is being conventionally indirect in making requests, as in:

"There wouldn't, I suppose, be any chance of your being able to lend me your car for just a few minutes, would there?" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 142)

"Would you have any objections to my borrowing your car for just a while?" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 143)

In both examples, S uses linguistic and grammatical elements, like "suppose," "chance," and "question tags," to betray his uncertainty as to whether H is prone to do any such acts expected of him. For this reason, we propose to label this Neg Pol strategy as the Indirectness strategy.

3.2. Not Presuming or Assuming

This is the second negative politeness strategy, and the speaker can achieve it by making use of questions and hedges, which are grammatical units abundantly used in negative politeness strategies. In making use of this Neg Pol strategy, the speaker also makes minimal assumptions and presumptions about H's wants and what is relevant to H. The following examples give us an idea of how the second negative politeness strategy can be achieved:

I rather think that George is not coming this evening.
To the best of my recollection, I don't quite remember having seen him in the meeting.

The basic function of this strategy and the one preceding it, as intended by the speaker, is to make the hearer at ease and not compelled to comply with the speaker's wishes, and so can suitably be called the hedging strategy.

3.3. Not Coercing H

This broad mechanism encompasses not less than three other negative politeness strategies numbered 3 to 5, which are not being optimistic, mitigating threat or imposition on H, and showing respect. The speaker's aim in using these three Neg Pol strategies is not to coerce H when the FTA requires H to take some action and/or exert effort.

The third Neg Pol strategy, then, is that of being pessimistic as to the likeliness of H's complying with S's intention (s). The elements of pessimism available to the speaker include using negatives (with a tag question), using the subjunctive case, and using markers of unlikely possibilities, as exemplified in the following:

"I don't imagine there'd be any possibility of you ..." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 174)
"You don't have any manilla envelopes, do you by any chance?" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 175)
Perhaps you'd care for a lift.

The underlying reason behind S's being pessimistic in making the above requests is to give H the possibility/option not to act or comply with S's wishes. This freedom of action for H serves to lessen or redress the threat inherent in the FTA of requests, bearing in mind the third broad mechanism of not coercing H. Under this mechanism, the speaker has the fourth Neg Pol strategy available to him, minimizing the threat or imposition on H. "One way defusing the FTA is to indicate that of the intrinsic seriousness of the imposition is not in itself great. So, indirectly, this may pay H some deference" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 176) as it is exemplified in the following:

"I just want to ask you if you could lend me a single sheet of paper." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 177)
"I just dropped by for a minute to ask if you ..." (op. cit.)

In the above extracts, S is minimizing the threat on H by rendering the imposition of the FTA lighter so as not to constitute a threatening burden to H's freedom of action.

The speaker can also show that he is not coercing H by giving deference, which is the fifth Neg Pol strategy. In this case, either S debases himself or praises H and pays him a positive face of some kind through the use of "honorifics," which are direct grammatical encodings of relative social status. Probably, all "languages encode deference in generalized forms of address for strangers" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 182), unfamiliars, etc. In English, terms of address originally had aristocratic connotations: Sir, Madam, Lady, etc. The following example denotes that terms of address are used as a strategy to mitigate FTAs by showing that there is no risk to the addressee:

"Did you move my luggage?" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 183)
"Yes, Sir, I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind." (op. cit.)

Another way of showing deference to H is by humbling oneself when serving a meal or asking for help, as in:

"I think I must be absolutely stupid, but I simply can't understand this map." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 185)
Waooh, I was dead sure I failed that test (when accepting congratulations).

Despite their apparent dissimilarities, the last three negative politeness strategies have at least one feature in common: their function, as intended by the speaker, is to make H feel he is not coerced, thus redressing the threat in FTAs. For this reason, we suggest that they be considered not as separate and thematically different strategies but rather as different, complementary applications of the high-order Neg Pol strategy of Uncoercing H. There is every reason to believe that there seems to be an organic relationship between these three low-order strategies in their thematic structures. It might well be argued that such a review is idealized, but the very fact that these three Neg Pol strategies focus on the same generalized aim of not coercing H makes provision against the unnecessary division of high-order strategies into low-order ones.

3.4. *Communicating S's Desire not to Impinge on H*

One approach to attending to H's negative face desires is to show that S knows them and is taking them into consideration when communicating FTAs. This subgroup incorporates four different Neg Pol strategies: making apologies, impersonalizing S and H, formulating the FTA as a general rule, and, finally, nominalizing. The speaker's aim behind the use of these Neg Pol strategies is basically to communicate S's desire not to impinge on H.

The sixth Neg Pol strategy of apologizing can be realized in many ways to communicate regret or reluctance to do an FTA. So, the speaker can acknowledge the impingement, as in:

Look, I hope this is not bothering you so much, but . . .

Or indicate his reluctance (using hedges, etc.):

Normally, I wouldn't dare to ask you this, but . . .
Look, I don't intend to bother you, but . . .

Or give immense reasons:

"I can think of nobody else who could . . ." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 189)
I simply can't sort out how to . . .

Or beg forgiveness for risking an FTA:

"I beg your indulgence." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 189)

With respect to the apology strategy, there is an interesting point that is worth stressing here. The sixth Neg Pol strategy is realized in 4 seemingly different ways. Still, the speaker's intention behind these variations is, after all, to apologize for having to make FTAs, and these variations are subsumed under the same heading of apologizing. Bearing this argument in mind, it has been suggested that politeness strategies, in Brown and Levinson's sense, can be considered not as independent entities but rather as different applications subordinate to a high-order strategy, which can encompass one or more low-order strategies that serve the same end. This point leads us to believe that the notion of strategy is such an all-embracing concept that we must take great care to present it in a way that does not prejudice its conceptual basis and use.

Under the heading of the fourth broad mechanism of negative politeness of communicating S's want not to impinge on H, the speaker can dig out the seventh Neg Pol strategy of impersonalizing S and H. By making use of this strategy, the speaker avoids the pronouns. "I" and "You," thus "dissociating S and H from the particular infringement" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 187) of an FTA. The speaker can achieve this by using Imperatives in commanding (most intrinsically face-threatening speech act), by using impersonal verbs, like "It is necessary that . . . ,"and "Il faut que . . . ," using the passive and circumstantial voices. Using the passive and the rule of agent deletion is perhaps the best way in English to avoid reference to whoever is involved in FTAs:

I regret that . . .

It is regretted that . . .
If you can . . .
If it is possible . . .

The speaker can also replace the pronouns "I" and "You" by indefinite or by avoiding reference altogether, as in:

"One shouldn't do things like that." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 197)

Instead of saying:

"You shouldn't do things like that." (op. cit.)
Further details should have been sent (to us by you)

The basic technique that is exploited in this variety of instances of the seventh Neg Pol strategy is conventional indirectness in order to avoid directly addressing or engaging H in the impingement of FTAs. By so doing, the speaker anoints the hearer's negative face and shows a willingness not to hinder H's freedom of action or impede his attention.

Another way of dissociating S and H from the imposition inherent in FTAs is by stating the FTA as a general rule, which is the eighth strategy of negative politeness. The speaker communicates his intention not to be willing to impinge on H and the fact that he is forced to do so by the situational context; therefore, he formulates the "FTA as an instance of some general, social rule, regulation or obligation" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 206). In this way, the hearer feels that if there is any threat to his negative face, it cannot be attributed to the speaker, who might not be the direct beneficiary of the FTA. The ensuing sample provides examples of this Neg Pol strategy:

"Passengers will please refrain from flushing toilets on the train." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 206)
International regulations require that the fuselage be sprayed with DDT. (op. cit.)

A point that is worth stressing with respect to the eighth Neg Pol strategy is that, although its aim is to attend to H's negative face, its focus lies more on the speaker than the hearer. In fact, by formulating the FTA as a general rule, S intends to convey that he bears no responsibility for the impingement of the FTA by dissociating himself. The hearer grasps the underlying message and does not feel S is threatening his negative face wants.

Besides, this Neg Pol strategy can be effectively used more often in written language than in spoken language. This is because the addresses(s) targeted cannot be known beforehand, in person, but are rather conceived of as constituting a wide range of the population concerned.

A fairly different approach to show S's desire not to impinge on H is through the use of the ninth Neg Pol strategy of nominalization. According to Brown and Levinson, it seems that "degrees of negative politeness (or at least formality) run hand in hand with degrees of nouniness: that is, formality is associated with the noun end of the continuum" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 207). In the coming examples, the degree of nouniness operates from the verb to its noun counterpart via a gerund:

You performed well on the examinations, and we were all impressed.(Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 207)
Your performing well on the examinations was impressive to us. (op. cit.)
Your good performance on the examinations made a favorable impression on us. (op. cit.)

Intuitively enough, "the more nouny an expression, the more removed an actor is from doing or feeling or being something: instead of the predicate being attributed to an actor, the actor becomes an attribute (e.g., adjective) of the action" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 208). Besides, the nouniness degree corresponds to a passive tone of the action, and, therefore, contributes in "dissociating S and H from the particular" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 187) infringement of the FTA.

The last three strategies numbered 7, 8, and 9, are all used to serve and help dissociate S and H from the particular infringement of FTAs. For this reason, we suggest grasping this generalization by considering them as three low-order strategies of some high-order strategy, which we propose to label as the Dissociation strategy. Together with the sixth Neg Pol Apology strategy, it communicates S's desire not to impinge on H. In other words, the application of the fourth broad mechanism can be achieved by S through the Apology strategy or the three different low-level strategies of impersonalizing S and H, stating the FTA as a general rule, and nominalizing. Considering the close similarity, not in

outward structure, but in their basic function, we posited that these three low-level strategies should be considered not as separate entities but as different realizations of the same high-order strategy of dissociation. Making a conceptual distinction of this kind between high-level and low-level strategies is certainly an essential aid to clear thinking and apprehension of the notion of strategy as advanced by Brown and Levinson.

3.5. *Redressing Other Desires of H*

The tenth and last negative politeness strategy in Brown and Levinson's framework is that of redressing H's other desiresrelated to his negative face. It "consists in offering partial compensation for the threat inherent in an FTA by redressing some particular other wants of H" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 209). Two strategies, previously outlined, naturally related to such wants attributed to H: showing respect to H by intending that he deserves respect and esteem: acknowledging that in making "some FTA that imposes on H, one has incurred a debt, and perhaps added to already existing debts" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 209), as in:

I'll never manage to requite you if you could . . .
I'd be eternally grateful if you'd . . .

So, the speaker can actually mitigatean FTA by showing explicitly that he is indebted to H or by waiving any indebtedness of H through various expressions such as the above, for requests, or other expressions used for offers, as in:

"I could easily do it for you." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 210)
"It wouldn't be any trouble; I have to go right there anyway." (op. cit.)

There is a need to assess the usefulness of making a fundamental, clear-cut distinction between high and low-order strategies. This clarificatory point stems from the basic concern of observing the prerequisite notion of economy, germane in a scientific account of language use and/or usage.

4. Conclusion

This paper has contributed to reducing the total number of positive politeness strategies from fifteen to seven high-order Pos Pol strategies and the number of negative politeness from 10 to 5 high-order Neg Pol strategies. This reanalysis ultimately builds up a self-consistent and coherent picture of polite usage that is intuitively satisfactory and economical. We end up with a general frame of reference that presents an organized analysis and theory of politeness, the main point of which is that it purports to be a general explanation of the particular phenomenon of disparity of usage and universality of use of politeness.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

References

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. CUP.